

PORTRAIT OF THE INAUTHENTIC NEGRO

How Prejudice Distorts the Victim's Personality

ANATOLE BROYARD

RECENTLY, in a night club, I heard—or rather watched—a Negro entertainer do a song about racial discrimination. During the rendition he twisted his neck into the grotesque posture of a hanged man, and bit off his words in a melodramatic imitation of strangling. When he had concluded the song, and the elaborate pantomime that accompanied it, the audience, which had come to hear bebop, applauded. I didn't applaud. The performance was outrageously false—even falser than most night club performances. There was something insidiously glib and confident about it—something that went beyond mere insincerity—and the audience too was curiously complacent, almost as though they had been rehearsed. They applauded this accusing

dirge exactly as they would a routine piece. Could they have failed to understand it? I studied the singer for an answer, and, at that moment, he bowed in a mannered way and smiled—a *smile of complicity*—and then I realized that it was I who had failed to understand the song. It was obviously a parody! His smile and their applause gave it away. It wasn't a song about discrimination as I had so naively supposed—its actual theme was the *double entendre* between singer and audience, a kind of cultish collusion by which both denied the words. The real social significance of the piece lay in its very lack of significance.

I looked around—apparently I was the only one who refused the easy offering. The audience was still grinning, and the singer was already beginning his encore, a typical crooner ballad. A moment ago a lynching, and now a supplication to his “baby”—all in the same universe of discourse, all in a day's work. A real American juxtaposition—the kind that conditions us to digest, day after day, the most poisonous kind of diet. I had an impulse to boo, but I knew better. I would be denounced as anti-Negro. Even the Negro singer would denounce me, because he sang, and they applauded, the agreement between them, an agreement not to go beyond this point, to let well enough alone. He had his act, they had their indifference. . . . What more did I want? What was I anyway—a troublemaker?

IN HIS book *Anti-Semite and Jew* (published as a series of articles in COMMENTARY in the April, May, and June issues of 1948), Jean-Paul Sartre analyzed the psychological effects upon the personality and behavior of Jews of an unsympathetic surrounding world. Here ANATOLE BROYARD attempts a similar analysis of the situation of the American Negro, which he knows at first hand. To him, as to Sartre, the ultimate horror of discrimination is the victim's unconscious remolding of his own personality into something untrue to himself. At a time when social action is the accepted sovereign remedy, Mr. Broyard's doubts about the value of organized group struggle against oppression may seem highly debatable to most; and others will find his prescription of individual responsibility and self-determination strong medicine indeed. By the same token, there will be few who will not be moved by the deep sense of pain and outrage expressed here and the faith in the individual's possibilities which the writer's proposed solution manifests. Mr. Broyard was born in New Orleans in 1920, attended Brooklyn College and the New School for Social Research, and now teaches in the Division of General Education, New York University.

IN HIS “Portrait of the Inauthentic Jew” (COMMENTARY, May 1948), Jean-Paul Sartre describes as *inauthentic* the Jew who implicitly or explicitly accepts the anti-Semite's definition of the Jew, who “proves” the anti-Semite's accusations by devoting much of his efforts to guiltily dissociating himself from any semblance of Jewishness. Sartre

refers to the inauthentic Jew's evasions of his situation as "avenues of flight," and goes on to say that, to understand the problem, we must recognize these "avenues of flight" as strategies rather than as innate qualities.

In extending Sartre's analysis to the inauthentic Negro, an important difference should be pointed out: the Negro usually cannot conceal his identity, and thus, denied this simple escape, his reaction to the anti-Negro's allegations undergoes many more inversions and takes on many more layers of unreality. The inauthentic Jew is represented by Sartre as extremely self-conscious; the inauthentic Negro is less aware of the precise nature of the conflict in which he is caught. It has not yet been articulated for him by fictional or analytical writers as has the Jew's, and he has been too trapped in its mechanisms to see it unaided. Since he cannot hide from society, he often hides from himself. In fact, one can say that, in many cases, the inauthentic Negro almost entirely occupies himself with either affirming (ingratiation) or denying by his behavior what the anti-Negro says about him, until his personality is virtually usurped by a series of maneuvers none of which has any necessary relation to his true self.

According to Sartre, the term "inauthentic" implies no moral blame, for he regards it, and rightly so, as designating a kind of neurotic symptom, one understandably engendered by rejection at the hands of the all-powerful privileged majority. To appreciate the universal nature of inauthenticity, one need only examine the reaction patterns of any unfavored minority. And, to go further, it can even be shown that, in our society, almost every individual characteristic that radically tends away from the norm results in a degree of personality distortion. A very fat or very short man, for example, will in all probability develop special adaptive behavior. Or, to take a more subtle case, the contemporary artist, too, is frequently forced, by virtue of his nonconformity, into affectation and rationalization.

As an illustration of how Negroes' attitudes may be shaped by one kind of social

pressure—occupational discrimination—I can cite a vivid example drawn from my own experience: One day, while walking through an Italian slum, I saw two Negroes—one about fifty, the other in his late twenties—shoveling manure from a stable into a truck. Struck by the symbolism of the scene, I stopped and regarded them for a moment. They noticed me, and, in turn, looked at me too. The older man's face was without expression; he was weary of scorn; his look seemed to say, "Yeah, I know, I'm a nigger and I'm shoveling manure, just like you'd expect." The younger man, though, appeared fiercely resentful, as though he might let me have a shovelful in the face. This incident was an epiphany for me. It showed one man's defeat, another's defiance, actuated by the same symbol, one whose meaning is unmistakably embodied in countless metaphors of our everyday speech. (The preponderance of Negroes among toilet attendants is part of the same symbolism.)

Admittedly then, authenticity is difficult to attain. To make it even more difficult, no one seems to know exactly what it consists in. Authenticity, as I take it, would mean stubborn adherence to one's essential self, in spite of the distorting pressures of one's situation. By the Negro's essential self, I mean his innate qualities and developed characteristics as an individual, as distinguished from his preponderantly defensive reactions as a member of an embattled minority.*

MOST pro-Negro agencies have dealt with the Negro's situation as such, and most of their proposals have tended toward en-

*Obviously, of course, the Negro cannot develop in complete independence of his situation, but he can resist it in a more useful way; he can react against his reactions, and absent himself from the dialectical process of discrimination until—pushed by progress in understanding—it lamely falls over on one leg. In this he has certain advantages over the Jew, who, as Sidney Hook (*Partisan Review*, May 1949) has pointed out, is historically more explicitly and fundamentally opposed to Christian society. Writing more as a tragedian than as a social critic, Sartre advises the Jew to proudly carry his cross to his own crucifixion. The necessity of this martyrdom for the Jew (or the Negro) has been systematically refuted by Professor Hook in the same article.

abling the Negro to defy society's discrimination legally; they have apparently taken it for granted that, though inhumane, this discrimination is based on an objective evaluation of the Negro's social potential. Involved here are a number of confused assumptions that go a long way toward making the ideal of authenticity *unattractive* as well as difficult to attain. That the Negro's social potential is radically lower than the white's is seriously open to question. The assumption that it is, is generally based on two considerations—a behavioral and an aesthetic judgment of the Negro's "racial characteristics." Unreasonably generalizing in the face of all kinds of particular pressures, the anti-Negro alleges that the Negro is inherently lower in intelligence and more bestial in behavior than whites. This first claim is no longer taken very seriously by anyone but the rabid anti-Negro, as sociologists have finally exposed the falseness of the "evidence" supporting it. The second charge, however, still profoundly embarrasses both Negroes and pro-Negro agencies or individuals. The Negro's "blackness"* remains like a spot before their eyes. "How would *you* like to have a *black* baby?" still strikes terror into every heart, and even Negroes are quick to distinguish between light and dark.

This stain doggedly endures. It is the touchiest part of the Negro's defensiveness, as witnessed by the self-consciousness of his dress, his ubiquitous hat, his fondness for mustaches, etc. He seems to have no answer for this original blot on his escutcheon—and yet, answering it is so easy as to seem almost absurd.

The falsity of such physiognomic discrimination becomes immediately apparent when we realize that thousands of Negroes with "typical" features are accepted as whites merely because of light complexion, and when we further supplement this first lack of recognition with the converse case of

the dark-skinned Negro who posed as an Oriental in a turban, and was cordially received all through the South. Then, too, it is extremely ironical that the Negro's color and hair texture are cited as signs of physiognomic inferiority by the very persons who spend considerable time and money burning themselves to similar hues and going to beauty parlors to have their hair frizzled. As for the much criticized grossness of Negro features, this is a greatly exaggerated conception, based on facial types which are far from uniform. Also, such evaluations completely leave out of account all question of other peoples' ugliness. There is no reason to believe that the incidence of ugliness is greater among Negroes than among non-Negroes.* And even if it were, much of it could be attributed—like so many of the Negro's so-called inherent characteristics—to poverty, which, as Céline remarked, "is like a giant that uses your features like a piece of cotton waste to wipe a filthy world."

TO APPROACH the question from the other side, Negro physiognomy is one of the favorite subjects of modern portrait sculpture, and the full lips and prominent bone structure of so many Negro faces is almost identical with that of *Vogue* models. And, if the Negro is more prognathic than most Caucasian types, this prognathism is the physiognomic hall mark of American males, as attested to by foreign satirists and by our own ideal image of ourselves (comic strips, advertising, Hollywood, etc.). In our society, it is considered infinitely preferable to the weak chin of a Casper Milquetoast. The average American Negro's muscular physique—setting aside the question of how far it was determined by selective breeding in slavery—is far from being considered undesirable. On the contrary, it is one of the strongest elements working against him in the anti-Negro's envy and fear.

All this goes to show the contingent nature of the Negro's inferiority feelings, as

*The prejudicial word "black" is uncritically accepted by all parties concerned, in spite of its inaccuracy and its exclusively pejorative associations, such as the *black* ugly duckling, the *black* sheep, expressions like *blackguard*, *blackhearted*, etc., the frequent representation of the *devil* as black, etc.

*According to our standards, the Chinese's small stature, relatively expressionless eyes, and sallow complexion would seem far more undesirable than the Negro's alleged characteristics.

well as the true character of the standards applied against him. If the Negro is inferior, he is inferior by conditioning rather than endowment, and if he is "ugly," he is ugly not by nature, but *by definition*. Still, whatever the source of these evaluations, to the Negro they are painfully real, and it is partly on the basis of his own conditioned response—as well as society's reaction—to them, that his personality is formed and he prepares a face to meet the faces that he'll meet. Against such continuing prejudices, authenticity would be indeed heroic, but the preceding analysis, in exposing their lack of objective foundation, proves, it is hoped, that they cannot long resist the informed Negro's determination. In what follows I will attempt to show where that determination can be reclaimed from the irrational struggles of inauthenticity.

THE performance of the Negro night club entertainer mentioned at the beginning illustrates one of the inauthentic Negro's main avenues of flight—one which I propose to call *minstrelization*. Minstrelization results from the inauthentic Negro's acceptance of his situation as defined by the anti-Negro, and his attempt to make himself comfortable in it. "Keep smiling" is often his motto. Thus, for example, a Negro waiter in a restaurant I frequent smiles broadly or laughs no matter what one says to him. This is all the more remarkable since he has absolutely no sense of humor. Minstrelization can perhaps be explained historically: slave-owners probably gave preference to "good-natured" Negroes; thus a smiling countenance would increase one's chances for a less back-breaking job, or possibly avert a whipping, etc. But today, in non-Jim Crow cities, this attitude is certainly unnecessary. Today minstrelization is, in some cases, a useless reflex, and, in others, a willingness on the part of the inauthentic Negro to exploit his situation. He procures the approval of the whites by dissembling any suggestion of opposition between them, by making a clown of himself, and by demonstrating himself to be exhilarated by their patronage.

Minstrelization takes innumerable forms, in each case involving the Negro's willing capitulation to the anti-Negro's definition of him. A subtle example is the attribution of inherent greater "rhythmicality" to the Negro, and the inauthentic Negro's acceptance of this alleged trait, which is taken to show, of course, that the Negro is a more primitive creature, more animal-like, not yet emancipated by the short-circuiting effects of full consciousness from the primeval earth-throb. It is in the same category with the dog's sense of smell, the cat's ability to see in the dark, the mating instinct of mammals, etc. In an experiment, a psychologist even demonstrated that Negro children had better rhythmical responses than white children—which proves nothing about the Negro children except that they have not been equally encouraged to develop those inhibitions of rhythm correlated with white "refinement." To see how conditional this characteristic is, one need only go to a middle-class Negro dance, where there is no conspicuous rhythmical superiority.

Thoughtlessly accepting the white's attribution of greater rhythmicality to them, many inauthentic Negroes have made themselves arbiters of jazz music, popular dancing, and, by extension, all matters of extreme sensation and stimulation, including sexual behavior. Dramatizing this role, they have developed special rhythms in walking, speech intonation, etc.

Much of Negro humor is sadistically minstrelized, most of the jokes making capital of the Negro's unhappy situation. It may be objected that humor at one's own expense is often used to make an unpleasant situation more tolerable: in Germany under Hitler, for example, ironical authoritarian jokes were secretly circulated and served as a release for the oppressed minorities. However, the difference is this: in the case of the inauthentic Negro's humor, the identification is with the oppressor, the jokes are not ironical, i.e. inverted expressions of pathos, but self-hating and sadistic. This sadism is clearly revealed, incidentally, in the inauthentic Negro's frequent application of the abusive

term "nigger" to members of his own group, and particularly in a highly exacerbated form of humor called "the dozens." "Playing the dozens" was a fad current among New York City Negroes some fifteen years ago. "The game," as it was called, consisted of insulting one another in the most extreme terms imaginable, imputing all sorts of corrupt behavior (usually of a sexual nature) to one's opponent and his immediate family. John Dollard, the well-known Yale sociologist, explained "the dozens" on the basis of the frustration-aggression hypothesis, which goes something like this: the Negro is frustrated in his striving for status; frustration engenders aggression; thus, the Negro's aggression is expressed against his companions in playing "the dozens." What is conspicuously lacking in Dollard's analysis is the explanation of why aggression should take this particular form and not another. Why is it only and precisely the Negro who has developed it? The answer should be obvious: because he identifies himself with his oppressors, and, consequently, empathizes into their contempt and hatred for the Negro.

Here is an actual example of spontaneous inauthentic Negro humor: In a poor Negro section in Brooklyn, a man of about thirty, walking his dog on a leash, encountered a group of his acquaintances. He was immediately greeted with derisive laughter, and one of the group shouted, "You aint 'sposed to be walkin' no dog, nigger! White people walks dogs! You 'sposed to be on a leash yo'self!" Taken in itself, this humor may not seem necessarily sadistic, but I witnessed the incident, and the sadistic intent of the group was unmistakable. It was further proved by the reaction of the man walking the dog: he felt himself ridiculed, instead of joining in the group solidarity to laugh away their common disadvantage. He and the group were polarized in opposed attitudes, aggressor and attacked.

CLOSELY allied to minstrelization is *romanticization*, another avenue of flight. Influenced by the current conception of the suffering artist or *poète maudit*, and by the

identification of the artist as a rootless, alienated individual, many persons, feeling themselves discriminated against, have attempted to make a virtue of their situation, and have even tried to find in it a *raison d'être*. The heavy burden of guilt carried around by "progressive" people facilitates this attempt: anyone arrogating special airs to himself by virtue of society's maltreatment of him is guiltily acclaimed as some sort of hero. Certain psychoanalysts have even made heroes of various neurotic types. Thus, many Negroes have seen fit to consider themselves as crucibles of cultural unrest, as alembics boiling with the passionate crises of their society.

And the sado-masochistic character of so much of contemporary sexual behavior has given this attitude a strong component of sexual attraction, so that the Negro is seen by certain misguided whites as a beautiful, exotic creature, oppressed by our society like a handsome black panther in our cruel zoo, or as one sinned against, whom they wish to compensate by clumsily offering themselves. The drum beat of secret forces in the Negro is a familiar theme in inauthentic Negro novels. Here, for example, is a passage from *Alien Land*, by Willard Savoy (Dutton, 1949):

*He was something dirty.
Something to be spat on.
Something to be driven and cursed.
Not someone.
Something.
He felt that in the words—in the stares.
He felt that and was sick with anger and shame.
Sick—with the sickness of a race-old, futile despair.
Angry—with a hate that is not bred of reason.
Ashamed—with the desperate shame of a human being stripped of dignity.
Naked, pride whipped and bleeding.*

The very rhythm, mood, and linear arrangement of this passage shows that the author intended it as a prose poem of the tom-tom variety.

The real content of the inauthentic Ne-

gro's romantic attitude may be summed up in the idea that society owes him something, and, in specific situations, those people from whom he wants something owe him acquiescence. During the war this attitude was common in many soldiers, white and black. Now the inauthentic Negro wears his skin as a uniform, the uniform of a man fighting a war for you, against your worst self.

As part of his self-romanticization, the inauthentic Negro often forms exclusively Negro art projects— theater groups, anthologies, etc. These sometimes have the unfortunate consequence of encouraging a belief in the essential "difference" of Negroes. I remember hearing a woman exclaim at a Greenwich Village party, "Oh, I adore Negro theater!"—distinguishing "Negro theater" as one would say "flea circus" or "elephant ballet."

THE two attitudes already discussed—minstrelization and romanticization—are attitudes of acceptance and quasi-acceptance, and have a more or less affirmative character. A third avenue of flight—the *rejected attitude*—is entirely negative in its manifestations. The rejected attitude is expressed in a saying once popular among certain Negro groups: "You might as well play the game as bear the name." This is a paraphrase of Shakespeare's

*'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed
When not to be receives reproach of being.*

The rejected attitude is like that of the child who, when unfairly accused by a parent of misbehavior, decides to be "really bad," as a protest against the accusation. The rejected attitude sometimes takes very subtle forms, many of which are so ramified as to be only speculatively traceable to the original real or imagined rejection. The rejected type studiously inverts the characteristics of the minstrelized type, whom he considers an unworthy sibling, a "mama's boy," and whom he describes as a "handkerchief-head nigger." Since the minstrelized type accepts the anti-Negro's attribution of high spirits and easy risibility to him, the rejected type carefully

avoids laughter or exuberance in the presence of whites, and, often, by extension, even in their absence. Unresponsiveness is his outstanding characteristic. Thus, he wears, inexorably, an expression of intent and non-spontaneous awareness, Veblen's "physiognomy of astuteness" which he attributed to the sporting and lower delinquent classes. Since spontaneity is considered naive, childlike (as in "child of nature"), and ingratulatory, the rejected type almost always inhibits spontaneity and refuses to commit himself.

This tendency is most clearly and dramatically demonstrated in the Negro's social-dance patterns, which are formal, rigidly controlled in spite of their apparent freedom, and composed in accordance with his dominant attitudes. In this form of dancing, it is almost invariable practice to withhold acquiescence to the beat as long as possible, sometimes omitting entire beats. In conversation and interpersonal response as well, there is a certain syncopation, not in the interest of style or mere "jazziness" of gesture, but essentially expressive of resistance or aloofness.

PERHAPS the most damaging inauthentic type of all is the one whose attitude toward his self takes the form of *bestialization*. To properly understand the genesis and elaboration of this attitude it would be useful to introduce a concept developed by Gregory Bateson called "schismogenesis." According to Dr. Bateson, much of cultural change occurs as the result of cleavage, and the consequent dialectical behavior of the separated groups. The separated groups may proceed in either of two relations to each other, which Bateson calls symmetrical or complementary. Symmetrical schismogenesis is like bidding at an auction; in reaction to each other, both groups increase their tendencies in a common direction. Complementary schismogenesis is a growing apart; each segment develops in opposition to the other. Applied to the Negro's situation, the first cleavage was complementary, into white and Negro, further specified as more and less civilized respectively. Accepting the "less civilized" role, in

the spirit of either ingratiation or rejection, the bestialized inauthentics then continued to widen the white-Negro gap in complementary directions, while cleaving, at the same time, each one against his fellows, in a symmetrical fashion, toward more defiant and non-civilized behavior. Because of his rejection of his true self, exacerbated by the unreality of his avenues of flight and the guilt they engender, the inauthentic Negro finds group solidarity impossible. Thus he develops antagonisms against those of his own group as well as against those whites who reject him. His insincerity and its resultant tensions isolate him from everyone.

Bestialization takes many forms, the most common being voluntary speech mutilations, both of syntax and intonation, such as, "Man, wut choo think you gonna do?" There is no question about the inauthenticity of these forms of speech, since many of those who affect them speak correctly when they desire to. Another form of speech mutilation is a high content of profanity, particularly of an aggressive sort. When asked what his chief duties were in a Negro settlement house for boys, a social worker acquaintance of mine answered, "Teaching them euphemisms for mother ——— [unprintable word]." The purpose of these speech habits seems to be the assumption of a primitive role, probably encouraged by the contemporary cult of the primitive, as well as by the connotations of physical dominance and sexual potency usually associated with primitiveness. The cultivation of the bestialized role sometimes goes so far as to cause younger boys (inauthenticity begins early) to affect or exaggerate prognathic characteristics, and to assume a catatonic apeline stance.

Part of the bestialized inauthentic's intention is, undoubtedly, to excite the white's envy. Thus, Dr. Henry Elkin remarked in a lecture at the New School for Social Research that the Negro is regarded by many (whites and Negroes) as the white man's Id. I remember, in fact, numerous instances of the bestialized type's attempts to capitalize on this conception. During the war, one of the men in my Negro stevedore company

pleaded sick, saying, "Lieutenant, ah cain't wuk t'day. Ma p—— hurt," imagining that this and similar excuses would be given credence by white officers, who, in deference to the Negro's alleged higher potency, would feel obliged to make allowances for sexual casualties.

Knife play, aggressive boasts, and pantomime threat are further instances of bestialization. In this connection, I recall a particular example, drawn again from army experience: A mild, well-behaved, and religious corporal began to show evidence of a psychosis. Significantly, the first sign of disturbance in him was aggressive behavior. He began to carry a bayonet in his belt, and he developed the profane speech patterns used by at least half the men in the company. The fact that his grudge against society, authority, or his self took this typical inauthentic form points up prophetically, if not verifiably, both the prevalence of the form and its irrationality.

I HAVE tried to show how minstrelization derives from the whites' attribution of high spirits and easy risibility to Negroes, how the rejected attitude derives from the denial of the minstrelized role: now, to complete the fantastic inverted pyramid of inauthentic behavior, I will try to show how a fourth avenue of flight derives, at the third remove, in opposition to bestialization. This fourth tendency I shall call *role-inversion*. Role-inversion comprises the deprecatory attempts of some inauthentic Negroes to dissociate themselves from the behavior of the bestialized type, and, to a certain extent, from all characteristics of the other inauthentic types that they deem unseemly and likely to cause further social disapproval. The chief forms of role-inversion are meekness, prissiness, unspontaneous religiosity, and highly effeminate male homosexuality. The meek inauthentic is "respectful" and "knows his place." The prissy inauthentic is easily recognized by a certain meaningless righteousness and painstaking propriety in his expression; he often wears rimless glasses. The pseudo-religious inauthentic shies away from the bestialized

Holy Roller churches, and is much given to the reading of religious pamphlets in the subway. The extremely feminine male homosexual denies in his behavior all allegations of brutality or aggression, in a surface attempt to secure love and acceptance.

The list of patterns of inauthenticity or avenues of flight could certainly be made longer, and new ones are developing all the time, but these, I think, are the principal current ones, and, in any case, their individual character is not the most important question; it is enough that these few be recognized and understood as symptoms of the complicated maladjustment of white-Negro relations. Legal problems are easier to solve than psychological ones. Organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People devote themselves almost exclusively to the former. Most of the recent books on the subject have been reviewed in these pages and have been shown to be ineffectual in a psychological sense. Those whites who have attempted to take ameliorative action have been, for the most part, "liberals," or "progressive" persons who usually do as much or more harm than good, asking the American public to take the Negro like a pill to cure a cultural hangover. Their clumsy apostrophizing of the Negro disgusts many Negroes and often bores or antagonizes those whites who are not already prejudiced. What is needed, above all, is plain speaking. Whites and inauthentic Negroes exist in a state of psychological war: everyone has taken a stand, and sticks to it. Some of the Negroes are collaborators, others are guerillas (often spelled "gorilla" in the tabloids), fighting it out without organization. The situation reminds one of a Hollywood drama of misunderstanding: All during the film you want to shout, "But don't they see? If only he didn't... then he wouldn't..." The discrepancy seems so obvious: if one could only get the principals to see, step by step, the development of their estrangement!

Worst of all, the inauthentic Negro is not only estranged from whites—he is also estranged from his own group and from him-

self. Since his companions are a mirror in which he sees himself as ugly, he must reject them; and since his own self is mainly a tension between an accusation and a denial, he can hardly find it, much less live in it. In extreme cases, he may be said to live wholly by conditioning from outside, like a dog trained to wag its tail or bite. In place of useful action, he has worked up an act. This act is his tradition, for he has no other. Unlike the inauthentic Jew, he has no cultural residue to which he can secretly return, or by which he can at least negatively orient himself. He is adrift without a role in a world predicated on roles. The inauthentic Jew knows that he has a role, however disadvantageous, whenever he wants it; he is at least an expatriate in a psychological sense, and this is a paradoxical consolation. The inauthentic Negro's only common bond is that of *not being* anything else. And, most unfortunately, this not-being is seized upon as a virtual principle by those who would help him. It is used as a rationalization for everything that he does not become. Lincoln emancipated the Negro from slavery; our contemporary liberals have emancipated the Negro from responsibility and self-determination. He has joined the wooden Indian—not in front of cigar stores, but in night club toilets, bootblack parlors, on ghetto corners, and in the pages of "progressive" papers.

ANY rational proposition presupposes a set of defined terms. Until the Negro defines his self, then, he's not going to get very far in formulating a program for living. At present, he is still between Jim Crow and political scarecrow—both propositions based on an *x* factor. "Somewhere unspeaking sits my life," wrote a contemporary poet, and perhaps the Negro's answer is "dumb speech kicking in the rivers of my blood." A group identity for the Negro would mean status and a commensurate frame of reference; it would mean that the Negro is no longer a total outcast looking in, his nose hungrily flattened against the other side of the window. It would give him a core, like the core of a baseball, enabling him to rebound.

But the inauthentic Negro still confounds the issue. To the anti-Negro he adds his anti-self. By his acceptance or denial of the anti-Negro mythology, he continually re-postulates it and keeps it alive. Having accepted the easy way of ingratiation or the secondary gratifications of his position, he is unwilling to listen to reason or consider change. And his attitude is infectious: Until he stops bleaching his skin and his soul with patent preparations, until he begins to straighten out himself instead of his hair, no improvement is likely. Certainly the situation into which he's born is untenable, but, instead of correcting it, he consolidates it, and, in so doing, plays right into the hands of his vigilant enemy, the anti-Negro. About the anti-Negro we can say very little that's new. We know him, he's been described; with a few adjustments, Sartre's portrait of the anti-Semite fits him too.

His relentless irrationality is enough to explain everything, and it is a misguided fear of seeming to propitiate him that discourages so many Negroes from attempting to improve their situation. But here they're mistaken; today the anti-Negro is a secondary

problem; their first problem is their individual selves, their own authenticity. Their personalities have been lost in the shuffle, a shuffle with marked cards, dealt from the bottom of the deck. If the majority of Negroes would authenticate themselves — i.e., prove themselves fundamentally "different" only in appearance — this would be an extremely important step in validating their desperately needed identity. For it is untrue to say of the inauthentic Negro that "he is a man just like yourself." He isn't, and all but the hysterically blind can see that he isn't. He's very careful to distinguish himself from you, sometimes spending his whole life making that distinction explicit and emphatic. If you reached for his hand, it might lie limp in yours, or he might thumb it over his shoulder. He might even hit you with it. Whichever he did, the NAACP, the Urban League, the progressive papers, *et al*, would explain that "you made him that way." And maybe you did, but that doesn't mean that you alone can unmake him by simply reversing the process. You can let him know that your mind and heart are open; the rest is up to him.